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## THE PROBLEM OF EUROPEAN DEFENSE

[Speidel, Hans, Rivista Marittima, Sept. 1974, pp. 49-60; Italian]

Lieutenant General Hans Speidel, Ph.D., professor (Honoris causa) from the University of Tübingen, where he taught for several years after World War II. For 2 years he was the Commander of Allied Forces in Central Europe (AFCENT).

The editor of this journal thanks General Speidel for granting permission to publish the text of his speech at the Center for Advanced Military Studies in Paris.

↙ The evolution of European defense is indissolubly connected to the evolution of world politics.

The geographic location of Western Europe and the concentration in Europe of economic and industrial potential determine the particular role that it is called upon to play in the field of global strategy. Any changes in the security policy of the great powers can cause a shift in the balance of forces in the world, and accordingly new conditions in Europe, the consequences of which cannot be foreseen.

The changes which have occurred up to now in the strategic concept of NATO have taken place over an extended period of time and under conditions of political change. The present status of the Atlantic Alliance is the result of political/strategic changes which took place in the last 10 to 15 years, during which it was constantly necessary to reexamine the credibility of the deterrence. ↗

During the first decade of the Alliance the strategy of massive retaliation had enormous deterrent value because it was securely based on the nuclear superiority of the USA. This superiority implied, on the one hand, certain destruction of any aggressor and, on the other, that the United States avoided unacceptable or incalculable risks. Absolute superiority was the basis for the credibility of this concept.



Because Soviet power came to equal that of the USA with unexpected rapidity, the political/military situation shifted steadily away from the absolute superiority of the United States to that of strategic balance, and the risk to all the member states of NATO increased.

The result of this was an increasingly reduced credibility of the strategy of massive retaliation which, in the case of conflict, offered only the alternatives of capitulation or total nuclear war. The Cuban missile crisis and the Vietnam War brought about a new orientation in the strategic concepts. That is why then Secretary of Defense McNamara made the following statement in 1966: "It is not possible to obtain credible deterrence through incredible actions, such as threatening to employ nuclear weapons against an aggression of minor importance." For NATO this meant the inevitable shifting in 1967 to the strategy of flexible response. This strategy, which always can come into play at the time of an enemy attack, consists in the first place of the appropriate military response, and in the second place, of the risk of a global nuclear struggle between the United States and the USSR. Within the framework of this process of incalculable "escalation" for the adversary, the tactical nuclear weapons of the European forces were considered to have mainly a political importance, as had already been delineated in 1966 by the withdrawal of the Eisenhower-Norstad agreement. Up until then, the President of the United States had given the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe the "de facto" power to employ the tactical nuclear weapons positioned in Europe. The political reevaluation of these weapons, which are absolutely indispensable because of the inability of Europe to defend itself by conventional means, has created the dilemma of how to employ them in time of war, particularly their inclusion in the operational plans. The value of the strategy of flexible response depends essentially on the connection, without interruption of continuity, between the various phases of "escalation" and, in particular, on the credibility of the pledge by the United States to defend its European partners.

What faith can we have today in the willingness of the United States to defend European interests? The recent crisis in the Middle East has disappointed the hopes that the Americans had in the policy of the Alliance. Western Europe is strengthening its economy without yet making decisive progress toward the political union that is necessary. The United States really looks to this union as the precondition for the assumption by Europe of greater responsibility in matters of security policy, which is without a doubt quite reasonable. In addition, it can be said that the increased economic importance of the European Community on the commercial and monetary level is creating in the United States the fear of European competition. This lack of political equilibrium gives rise in America to some symptoms of discontent with Europe. It is possible that the political leaders in the United States are regretting this trend and that they may still think that Europe is important to their interests. But they must always watch out for those increasingly more influential groups who demand disengagement by the United States, citing the great financial and economic

burdens of the last few years and the increasing difficulties of their country in Southeast Asia, in the Near East and, in part, in Europe. These groups attempt to take advantage of the present changes in the balance of strategic nuclear forces, because even the territory of the United States is now subject to direct nuclear attack in case of military conflict with the Eastern Bloc.

Faced with this nuclear parity, the United States and the Soviet Union have made every effort, since the Cuban crisis, to act jointly to defuse dangerous political developments, and to ward off a direct confrontation by means of permanent, reliable contacts between them. As a result, various agreements were made on the so-called "hot line" between the USA and the USSR, armaments control, suspension of nuclear testing, the exploitation of the sea bottom, strategic arms limitations (SALT I), and the non-proliferation treaty. The European allies of the USA must have realized a long time ago that the United States is increasingly doubtful whether to use intercontinental weapons in a military conflict in Europe.

This fact will undoubtedly influence European thinking about deterrence and security. While speaking about the changes in global strategy, it is also necessary to consider the Nixon-Brezhnev agreement of 21 June 1973 and that of 22 June 1973 on the prevention of nuclear war. It remains to be seen whether the two agreements constitute the beginning of an increased bilateralism or only the continuation of the current evolution. These two agreements, as well as the change in political conditions in the United States (which has been taking shape for some time now and is due to a certain neutralization of the American strategic nuclear deterrence), requires a realistic analysis of the situation from the standpoint of European security policy. Likewise, from 1968 on, a new outlook manifested itself in the thinking of the European members of NATO, when they recognized the need to play a more active role within the Alliance in the future. The 13th of November 1968, the day when the defense ministers of the European NATO countries meeting in Brussels set up the EUROGROUP within NATO, is historically important in the development of European defense. I must emphasize the words "within NATO", because the aim of EUROGROUP has never been and never will be that of loosening or dissolving the transatlantic ties. One of the principal missions of EUROGROUP is, on the contrary, that of proving to the US government and Congress that the European NATO members are ready to increase their contribution to the defense of the Alliance. Up to now, the EUROGROUP has created a certain number of sub-groups which study the most diverse problems of defense policy and seek to resolve them jointly. I consider the EUROGROUP to be an institution worthy of being expanded with a view toward closer cooperation in the future among the countries of Western Europe.

As of the NATO Council meetings in Reykjavik in 1967 and 1969, the sound formula for the political objectives of the Atlantic Alliance has been that of "security and detente." In order to limit the cost of the arms race of the two blocs and in order to guard the European territory



against crises, the Alliance has given special importance from then on to the detente factor. Also within this framework, are the active efforts by the Alliance partners to promote the Conference on European Security and Cooperation (CESC), as well as the SALT and MBFR negotiations which, it is hoped, will lead toward greater security based on a lower level of armament. These efforts have given some initial results which, at least as far as Europe is concerned, lie within the mere fact that the two sides are inclined to speak to one another. Such talks, by themselves, do not yet permit us to give way to the euphoria of detente, nor to take measures that could be justified by the state of progress in the negotiations. Actually, a unilateral, precipitous or unbalanced reduction of forces would alter the military equilibrium and dangerously compromise European security. I think that the West already suffered a defeat at the Vienna negotiations by agreeing to renounce the essential word "balance," following the strong demand by the Eastern Bloc. Security is the necessary requirement for detente, and the violation of this principle would have unforeseeable consequences. This is especially true now that after Israel, Western Europe too has lost a battle in the Middle Eastern war.

Until now, changes in policy have not been noticeable, neither with regard to the threat from Bolshevism, nor with regard to the defensive posture of the Alliance. Permit me to add some observations on this subject:

1. It is obvious that I can outline only in general terms the myriad problems, recalling at the same time the famous expression of Fredrick the Great: "Look after the details, they are not without glory."

2. The strategic nuclear parity between the USSR and the USA can lessen the credibility of using strategic weapons in case of limited aggression in Europe.

3. This development, which requires greater effort on the part of the European partners in the Alliance in the area of security policy, has instead led to a lowering of the defensive spirit in certain NATO countries, as can be seen from the fact that at a rather premature time, reductions are being planned right now in defense forces and budgets. Such erroneous implementation of the policy of detente not only puts the security of Europe immediately in danger, but also impairs the position of the Western partners in the MBFR negotiations.

4. The policy of "peaceful coexistence," extolled by the Soviets, has not failed to produce its psychological effect on some centers in all the Western countries and, in many places, it is creating the impression that the threat from the East is diminishing, or no longer exists. In this regard, it is necessary to guard against superficial interpretations of the concepts employed in the communist dialectic, because their content becomes comprehensible in most cases only in light of the actual interpretations given them within the Eastern regimes.



5. The international meeting of the communist parties in June 1969 established the following principles in regard to peaceful coexistence:

- a. "The masses must be urged toward a constant and persistent struggle against the Western social order.
- b. "The anti-imperialist struggle continues in the Third World and in the Western industrial countries. The anti-imperialist wars are legitimate.
- c. "All communists have the duty to conduct an implacable struggle against bourgeois ideology.
- d. "Coexistence must not be an end in itself, but a temporary way-station while waiting for the triumph of communism on a worldwide scale."

From the Soviet point of view, European security means covering its western frontiers in order to deal with the struggle with China, now on its way to becoming a great power, and improving its position in case of a conflict with the USA. If the "iron curtain" were shifted to the Atlantic shore, then in Soviet eyes a real detente would have been achieved. It would be the "natural frontier", to use Richelieu's concept.

For the Soviet Union, the policy of conciliation remains a purely tactical measure and is limited by time. During the next 15 years approximately, the USSR will insist on an agreement with the West in order to be able to reinforce its economic and military power. The Soviet bloc will then have augmented its power to a point where the Soviet Union will be able to renounce an agreement with the West and will then be able to conduct its policy from a position of superiority. The immediate aims of the Soviets are:

- To put an end to United States military presence in Europe;
- To break up the Atlantic Alliance;
- To prevent a political union of Western Europe;
- To establish a European security system and, through it, a control according to Soviet principles;
- Restructuring the European social order.

The principal problem in the future development of European security policy concerns the need for, nature of, and degree of American participation. For my part I exclude as a realistic possibility that Europe would relinquish assuring itself of sufficient military strength vis-a-vis the Eastern bloc and rely on political accords, because, in that case, the political conditions would change fundamentally and the considerations set

forth here would have to rest on a completely different basis.

Until Europe has the will to oppose communist domination and to preserve its freedom of action, it is not possible to imagine any solutions in this direction. The range of possibilities for European defense lies between two extremes: either Europe defends itself alone -- without US participation -- or, in the other extreme, it relies totally on American nuclear and conventional power.

Among the possible options there are three which are capable of meeting to the fundamental prerequisite of protecting Western Europe against Soviet military and political pressures:

1. Creation of an independent defense organization for Western Europe, with which the US will no longer be associated, and which will be capable of meeting by itself the needs of its security policy.
2. Complete reliance of Europe on the defensive capability of the US.
3. As a compromise between these two options, a European defense system, included in a transatlantic alliance that adjusts to changing conditions.

Other variations can be conceived which, however, would not basically change the aspects of the problem.

The necessity for American participation in a European system of defense depends on knowing whether Western Europe has need for a strategic deterrent component for its security and on whether it is ready to create a sufficient strategic capability on its own. Theoretically, it is possible today to imagine military confrontations on a conventional level, a tactical-nuclear level, and a strategic-nuclear level, it being understood that the highest level [of confrontation] does not exclude the two lower levels.

The time and the conditions for these three different types of war depend in practice and in the final analysis on the capabilities of the belligerents and on their willingness to accept "escalation".

This three-way division is particularly important for the evaluation of deterrent capabilities. In order for deterrence to be credible it requires, in addition to the spirit of defense, a minimum of power capable of creating an unacceptable risk for the potential adversary. The quality and the quantity of the actual defensive power necessary for effective deterrence therefore depend, generally speaking, on the power of the presumed adversary, and at the same time must take into account the combination of various types of offense the adversary has at his disposal. Conventional forces alone will never guarantee sufficient security against an adversary which has nuclear arms. The same is true of a confrontation between an



exclusively tactical-nuclear armament on the one side and a strategic-nuclear capability on the other.

In every case, the opponent who is in a position to conduct a conflict on every one of the higher levels will have superiority. And for an adversary equipped only to conduct a conflict on a lower level, it is theoretically impossible to exercise deterrence. Therefore, for Western Europe there can be no deterrence vis-a-vis the Eastern bloc until the strategic nuclear capability of the Soviet Union is neutralized to a point where it is no longer able to utilize it as a means of political pressure.

Sufficient conventional arms, or even tactical nuclear arms, would not therefore by themselves produce the desired effect in the case we have considered. Western Europe must then have a strategic nuclear capability.

Let us now take up the second part of the problem we have set for ourselves.

Among the European members of the Alliance only France and Great Britain are nuclear powers and only they would be able to form the nucleus of a European atomic force. For the other members of the Alliance, active participation would be problematical, and not just because of contractual obligations. Indeed, French-British cooperation would presuppose, besides certain technical problems, the resolution of numerous political problems. Because of many treaties, British nuclear capability is greatly dependent on the United States, and Great Britain is itself bound by the Moscow agreement on the suspension of nuclear testing and on the agreement on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Although France is much less bound by treaties, she would still have to adapt her nuclear policy -- until now "national" -- to the changing needs of a multilateral alliance. The same difficulty would occur in solving the problem of command. It could be finally solved only if Europe had a government which had the necessary decision-making powers, which would presuppose the political union of the participating states.

In regard to the equipment of its nuclear forces, Europe would have to overcome a considerable technical lag. In order to do that, a financial outlay would have to be made, one that all of the Alliance partners could make only at the price of great domestic political sacrifices. It would be necessary beforehand to weigh the importance and consequences of such a force. Only a second-strike capability -- even in the case of the superpowers -- permits complete freedom of political action. Yet it requires a large stockpile of arms or the creation of effective resources so costly that not even a unified Europe would be able to supply the required resources in the foreseeable future.

Right now I do not see any chance of Western Europe building a really adequate nuclear strategic force, since it lacks the political opportunities and financial wherewithal. The European partners of the Alliance



would certainly be able to purchase together whatever is necessary to create the strategic nuclear forces; yet a suitable solution to the problem of higher command and control of their employment will be found only on the basis of European unity.

The security of Europe is inconceivable without strategic nuclear protection. But Western Europe is not in a position to commit, in the foreseeable future, the necessary forces to achieve this protection.

Because of this, a solution to the problem can be found only within an alliance with the United States.

In the present state of global strategy, considering current information, it seems that the deterrence exercised by US strategic arms will be fully employed only in the case of a threat to the vital interests of the US. The policy of the European partners in the Alliance should therefore have the goal of the inclusion of Europe without restrictions in this area of vital interests. Cooperation in just the area of defense policy cannot be enough. In the future we can no longer expect the United States to be ready to assume additional financial burdens for us if we do not offer, in return, appropriate economic and commercial compensation. In addition, the Americans expect that Europe will make a major commitment in the defense area and that it will take a position which is comparable to that which she has occupied for awhile as an economic power. We Europeans must understand that every American government finds itself faced with domestic political difficulties that cannot be overcome without exacting from us corresponding commitments in the area of security. Europe will only be able to count on a credible protection by the United States to the extent that the US considers Europe as a partner indispensable to its vital interests in every area of policy and as an ally which conducts itself in a reliable manner.

For a long time the US has regretted the absence of a legitimate and responsible spokesman with the responsibility for making decisions in the name of all the states in Western Europe. I can only repeat that the crucial problem is that only a broadly united Europe will be able to create, in the long run, the necessary conditions for a policy of effective security and for the establishment of good relations with the United States.

In the future, the European members must increase their military effort in order to reduce the commitment of American forces, whose presence Europe cannot forego. An adequate presence of American forces remains fundamental and it indicates to every potential aggressor that it runs the inevitable risk of a direct encounter with the nuclear power across the Atlantic.

The attitude of France is particularly important in the problem of European security of the political union of Western Europe. An effective European alliance is inconceivable without the full participation of France.

Because of its position, the French territory is one of the most impor-

tant foundations in all European defense planning. Only the complete integration of French military and economic potential would permit a security policy and an effective Atlantic association. Not only France but also all the other states of Western Europe must realize that their policies are interdependent and that with this in mind they must act accordingly. Perhaps France would abandon her "national" strategy if a solid European structure existed that was also capable of safeguarding French interests. Such a command structure would have to be created, but it is only possible with the active participation of France. The organizations in existence today offer, in part, the possibility that they would agree to build a United Europe. They have this drawback: not one of these institutions encompasses all the areas of policy, and in each of them (such as the organization for Atlantic defense, the European Community, the Western European Union) only a portion of the European states is represented. What is lacking in the purely European organizations is the defense policy component, while NATO is almost exclusively occupied with problems of security policy. NATO has the advantage of including almost all the Western European states and also of having created, in the EUROGROUP, an effective organization for cooperation in Europe. Given the necessity of maintaining NATO and of ensuring its functioning, I think that it would be possible to extend the EUROGROUP to other political sectors, if France were ready to cooperate in this organization or in another organization. Such a solution would have the advantage of eliminating a priori any risk of dispersion in the field of defense policy and of avoiding therefore more easily any erroneous interpretation by the transatlantic partners of the Alliance.

It is really in the initial phase of the European Union that I consider the continual search for a security policy as the means for maintaining deterrence without interruption of continuity. To that end, it would be necessary to exhaust all possible trials.

While I have underlined the importance that the strategic nuclear component has for deterring a direct attack on the European part of the Alliance, on the other hand the fact still remains that such arms by themselves cannot create adequate security for Western Europe, taking into account above all the military balance that exists today.

One must assign the same importance to tactical nuclear power and to the conventional forces as to those that assure preventive protection against limited regional wars. Here too I see the even greater contribution that Europe must henceforth make toward easing the military burden. Unlike the strategic nuclear sector, a unified Europe would be able to free the US from a part of its responsibilities in the area of tactical nuclear arms, and therefore to make the employment of such arms commensurate with European interests. The credibility of this component of deterrence would correspondingly improve.

The same thing occurs in the conventional field where the creation of an at least approximate balance will require of Western Europe, because of



the superiority of the Warsaw Pact, large efforts and considerable financial burdens. Although the European states now feel little disposed to supply the necessary means for their security, they would have to become aware, especially now, of the fact that without a sufficient conventional protection, not only the risk of war will increase, but also that of vast nuclear destruction.

Up to now the possibilities for military cooperation in Europe have not been used to the fullest extent; the creation of the EUROGROUP represents a promising move in the direction of a future solution to this problem, after the failure, almost 20 years ago, of the project for the creation of the European Defense Community.

It will be possible to proceed to essential changes only when the military forces of all the European members of the Alliance are brought together, so as to create the operational plans and deal with organization, armaments, and logistics in an overall context, and to assign to the various partners partial missions to which they can devote all their efforts. But this presupposes in turn a close-knit union of the Western European states, so that defense policy can be assured of a supranational direction and that the members of this union will be able to renounce balanced national forces. The first attempts that can be perceived in this regard indicate a future solution of this type, apparently the only one possible.

Furthermore, our present military structures must be examined from the standpoint of their efficiency. Contrary to what is happening in the Warsaw Pact, the relations among the operational units and the complex of forces in our Western armies is so slight that it appears necessary to reorganize our forces, taking into account the present situation in Central Europe. The defense mission clearly formulated by the political command restricts, in the case of military conflict, the geographic zone to Central Europe. The economic development of this zone will, provided its overall defense is planned consistently, permit the military forces fighting on their territory in wartime to have all the necessary infrastructural and logistic means. It would be necessary to study whether the logistical support of the forces can be fully based in the future on civilian resources. A considerable increase in combat capability would be derived from them. A solution of this kind is based, moreover, on the idea that a military conflict in Western Europe will last only an extremely short interval, during which it would be necessary to strive, in the course of the first few days, to obtain a high degree of intensity in the operations, while at the same time accepting the idea of renouncing a planned long-term military logistic support. The defense structures required for such a goal would permit, while continually maintaining the combat strength, a considerable reduction of the units, and thus a considerable increase in their mobility.

Permit me to summarize:



We Europeans are incapable of creating a sufficient strategic nuclear balance; it seems therefore that if Western Europe -- even though it were united -- were to seek to follow an independent defense policy, that would be tantamount to the end of its own security, its own freedom. The idea of our leaving our military defense largely guaranteed by our American ally cannot be agreed to by the United States because of the change in the global strategic situation. I consider increasing the defensive forces of Europe in the conventional and the tactical nuclear fields, in close cooperation with the United States, for the purpose of maintaining the deterrence of limited, regional wars, to be one of the essential conditions for an effective security policy. The linking of the interests of Europe with those of the United States calls for a sufficient presence of American troops on the European continent and, in addition to an understanding on policy, a sincere association with the United States on the economic and financial level. The Secretary General of NATO, Josef Luns, declared on 26 March 1973:

"I ask -- and it is, I repeat, my sincerest and most carefully considered desire -- that, in the course of the upcoming negotiations, those who take part on either side of the Atlantic, should be continually careful, not only in their words, but also in their actions, so that no lasting harm is done to our transatlantic relations in general, nor in particular to our security bond with North America.

"For it is on this bond that, in the final analysis, our common freedom and common way of life depend."

In conclusion, I am concerned when I see that our freedom is being threatened increasingly by a demoralization coming from within. In every country there are radical forces which seek to exploit the opportunities presented by our democracy to move things further in that direction. Our government -- and we ourselves -- must intensify our judgment and vigilance, for otherwise all our forces for military defense run the risk of being useless. Georges Bernanos once said: "The universe is at the point of losing its freedom because it does not know what to do with it anymore." Must it be true for us? "Vestigia terrent!"

Only a politically united Europe will insure the protection of our freedom against external threats and will perform the necessary tasks to achieve such a goal. A credible deterrence can only be realized if the Command, sure of itself and confident in the future, will have at its disposal sufficient military forces inspired by the will of our peoples to defend their freedom.